

# Moses and the Exodus-Angel

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At the end of his days Moses is standing on the mountain gazing to the opposite side full of longing. There is the land God has promised to Israel, his people, but he must not enter it. The Renaissance painter Luca Signorelli (ca. 1450-1523) presents this moment in the last picture of the cycle on Moses in the Sistine Chapel; at Moses' side he placed an angel who is showing him the Promised Land.<sup>1</sup> With his head bowed Moses is standing beside the angel on a precipice and gazing full of longing to the opposite side. Then he turns away in order to descend from the mountain and to lie down to die. Even there the angel (or some other figure) is following him, but behind the descending Moses he is just to be seen as a shadow. When we turn to the Bible and have a look into the text talking about the death of Moses (Deut 34) we will not find any trace of an angel. Nevertheless, Luca Signorelli's fresco suggests that the angel has appeared to Moses even before and that he accompanied him on his way. So, let us see.

## 1. The Angel within the Flame of Fire

Let us go back from the ending of the narrative on Moses to its beginning. Exod 3 relates the calling of Moses as taking place at the burning bush, which came to be situated in the vicinity of the mountain of God. The narrator is obviously interested in the discovery of Mount Sinai as a holy area; this may be gathered from the Hebrew word designating the bush, סִנַּי, which for sure does not accidentally allude paronomastically to סִינַי, the mountain of God.<sup>2</sup> Of course, this does not mean that is an old tradition. It is even as likely to assume that the bush was chosen as a place of theophany only because of the homophony so that

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1 The legacy and death of Moses (with the Latin inscription "replicatio legis scriptae a Moise"), Rome, Vatican, Sistine Chapel (southern wall), about 1482; illus. in Kanter / Henry, Signorelli 98-100. The art historian's question whether Luca Signorelli himself is responsible for the scene with the angel, or whether Bartolomeo della Gatta executed it, will not be considered here.

2 Cf. already Greßmann, Mose 24.

God's appearance in the bush was modelled on the revelation on Mount Sinai.<sup>3</sup> But in the present text the mountain of God is not called Sinai. Rather, it is explicitly named Horeb, which will be discussed later. Anyway, it is there that we meet YHWH's angel for the first time in Exod (Exod 3:1-5):

1 Moses was keeping the small cattle of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. And he led the small cattle beyond the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb. 2 There the angel of YHWH appeared to him in a flame of fire right out of the bush. And suddenly he saw a bush burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 Moses said: "I will go and look at this great sight why the bush is not burnt (up)." 4 When YHWH saw that he approached to look at it, God called him right out of the bush and said: "Moses, Moses!" He replied: "Here I am!" 5 And he said: "Do not come closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, since the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

Turning towards the angel of YHWH who appears before Moses in v.2a, a first observation may be made. In the present text the angel's appearance right in the centre of the bush is coming too early since Moses notices the burning bush only in v.2b. This is expressed by the Hebrew phrase "and he gazed, and look" (וַיִּרְאֵה וַיִּבְחֹן), which always introduces a new, surprising element within narratives.<sup>4</sup> It seems obvious to assume that the angel's appearance not only interrupts the context of v.1 and v.2b,<sup>5</sup> but that it was positioned before the discovery of the bush, and thus before the call of Moses deliberately. Some further observations confirm this assumption: in v.2a the scene that has the angel appear before Moses in a flame of fire presupposes that Moses is close to the bush, whereas according to v.3 Moses still has to depart (סור) from the path in order to reach the bush. Already in v.2a Moses knows the reason for the uncommon sight that the bush does not burn up: it is the angel in the flame of fire and not a natural phenomenon. In v.3, however, his curiosity makes him look for an explanation for the bush not being consumed by fire. A possibility to explain the inconsistencies between v.2a and v.2b-3 is to assume that there is a change of narrative perspectives turning from the narrator to the character of

3 Cf. Exod 3:4 "and God called him right out of the bush" with 19:3 "and YHWH called him from the mountain". Van Seters, *Life* 40f., wants to relate the burning bush to the menorah; thereby the narration of the call of Moses would supply an aetiology of the cultic object.

4 Cf. e.g. Gen 18:2; 24:63; 29:2; 33:1; Josh 5:13; 8:20; Judg 3:24; 2Sam 13:34. The fact that the bush is a determined noun in v.2b does not hinder this view because the definite article going with סִנְיָה designates the species "a prickly bush" when it is first mentioned, afterwards it refers to "the aforesaid", cf. Jacob, *Buch* 44.

5 Cf. Gertz, *Tradition* 266.

Moses.<sup>6</sup> But this assumption is not satisfactory because one would expect that the character of Moses would be brought to the encounter with the angel. This, however, is not the case. The line of suspense within the original narrative is obviously a different one. Through the surprising discovery of the burning bush and through the once more miraculously heightened phenomenon of its not being consumed<sup>7</sup> by fire, it is leading to the experience immediately following in v.4, namely that God himself is present in this place. In order to achieve this intention of the narrative one has to switch from the angel to God in the present text. It is remarkable that this transition has already been prepared in v.2a by the redactor from the outset. Through the doublet “right out of the bush” (מתוך הסנה v.2a and v.4b) and the double occurrence of the addressee (אליו v.2a und 4b) the angel’s appearance and God’s speech become parallels; therefore YHWH’s angel can be kept in the background as compared to God’s speech on the synchronic level.

Still, from a diachronic perspective the question arises: Why is the angel introduced in Exod 3:2a at all? This question is quite adequate insofar as the angel does neither appear again within the call-narrative in Exod 3-4, nor in the course of the narrative about the exodus up to Exod 14. Apart from the strangely abrupt remark in Num 20:16 the part he plays during Israel’s departure from Egypt remains entirely vague. Instead, in Exod 3:7-8aα YHWH declares that he himself has descended to deliver his people from the Egyptians’ control and to take them up to a good and broad land. This land is characterized in v.8b as the residence (מקום)<sup>8</sup> of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, of course this is a later addition again.<sup>9</sup> It foreshadows a theme to be developed in the context of the following account – Judg 1:1-2:5 will describe it in detail –, namely the expulsion of the former inhabitants. But how will the Israelites get to this already inhabited land at all? Again, this question may only be answered by anticipating. Actually, in order to guide them, an angel of YHWH is commissioned, as may be gathered from Exod 23:23 (see below). Considering that God’s speech in Exod 3:7ff. already evokes the idea that the land is the aim of the delivering, it is easy to see that the

6 Cf. Childs, Book 49f.: “2a functions as a superscription to the story (cf. Ex. [Gen 1] 18.1), whereas 2b describes the chronological sequence.”

7 The original meaning of בער I qal is “to burn, to take fire, to catch fire”, pi’el “to kindle, to set on fire, to ignite”. The resultative aspect “to burn up, to consume” is as a rule expressed by אכל, cf. e.g. Num 11:1; Isa 9:17; 10:17.

8 Cf. Exod 23:20!

9 For a list of the land’s former inhabitants cf. also Exod 3:17; 23:23; 32:2; 34:11; Deut 20:17; Josh 24:11; Judg 3:5.

redaction that was interested in the Exodus-angel, tried to introduce him at the outset of the exodus narrative. Remembering the appearance of the angel in Judg 13:20, the burning bush seemed an especially acceptable ingredient.

These observations lead to the result that YHWH's angel belongs to a supplementary layer that already bears in mind the journey to the promised land, i.e. that it is not part of a source traditionally identified as the Yahvist.<sup>10</sup> A first clue as to the probable circle of writers our author who supplied the addition belonged to, might be gathered from the localisation of the event, as the mountain of God and the Horeb are related.<sup>11</sup> As is well known the name "Horeb" is characteristic of the style of Deuteronomy and Deuteronomists; it was applied to the mountain of God as a substitute for "Sinai" which came to be avoided because of its association with Edom.<sup>12</sup> Anyway, it is extremely striking that "Horeb" is mentioned in Exod 3:1 because, regarding the homophony of the bush and the Sinai in Hebrew, one would expect the mountain of God to be left at least unnamed.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, scholars do not agree whether the redactor added the entire indication of the place "to the mountain of God, the Horeb", or just the name. The latter view is supported by the locative ending which seems to be superfluous in relation to the mountain of God.<sup>14</sup> Actually, within the Book of Exodus Horeb occurs again only once, namely in Exod 33:3b-6, a passage coined by Deuteronomistic writers – again in connexion with (YHWH's) angel (cf. Exod 33:2)!<sup>15</sup>

## 2. The Pillar of Cloud and the Angel

In the story about the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea (Exod 13:20-14:31) there are two different narrative lines, which were traditionally attributed to the Yahvist and the Priestly Code.<sup>16</sup> The non-

10 Cf. e.g. Schmidt, *Exegese* 228-234.

11 The only further occurrence of the phrase "the mountain of God, the Horeb" is found in 1Kgs 19:8.

12 Cf. Kaiser, חֹרֵב I 160f. Though traditional research found the name "Horeb" already in the Elohist source, it is witnessed only in Deuteronomistic literature, cf. Noth, *Studien* 29; Perlitt, *Sinai* 306-310.

13 Cf. Exod 4:27; 18:5.

14 The incoherence of "mountain of God" and "Horeb" is also confirmed by the Septuagint which offers the lectio facilius εἰς τὸ ὄρος Χωρηβ.

15 In Exod 17:6 "at Horeb" is obviously a secondary localization of the rock of Meribah, as it does not harmonize with the preceding adverb מִצֵּן in v.3, 6, cf. Noth, *Buch* 112.

16 Cf. the source-critical survey in Kohata, *Jahvist* 372.

Priestly text relates that YHWH went in front of the Israelites when they departed from Egypt, in a pillar of cloud in order to show them their way (cf. Exod 13:21a).<sup>17</sup> When the King of Egypt had his chariots prepared and started to pursue the Israelites, they were affected by fright. Moses, however, reassures the people and announces that YHWH is going to help the Israelites and to fight for them. On this occasion the Exodus-angel appears. But one is surprised because he just enters the narrative unexpectedly and as in passing. Afterwards he is not mentioned any more. Let us have a look at the text (Exod 14:19-20):

<sup>19</sup> *And God's angel, who went before the Israelites' army, set out and went behind them. And the pillar of cloud set out in front of them and took its place behind them.* <sup>20</sup> *And he / it placed himself / itself between the army of the Egyptians and the army of the Israelites, and the cloud caused darkness [and illumined the night].*<sup>18</sup> So the one army could not approach the other all night long.

Even at first glance it is obvious and traceable right into the wording that God's angel and the pillar of cloud are opposed to one another.<sup>19</sup> Both of them withdraw from their guiding position in front of the Israelites in order to fulfil a protective function. By placing themselves between the Israelites and their pursuers, they separate the two armies from one another and thus realize YHWH's help which he promised the people through Moses. But the narrative only tells us about the pillar of cloud, how it actually fulfils its protective function. It makes darkness spread between the two military camps and thereby it succeeds in keeping the Egyptians away from the Israelites while it is still day, but also later at night. The angel's role, however, remains a vague one; what he is doing is not said. This fosters the suspicion that his protecting function was prompted by the pillar of cloud which is not only firmly established within the story about the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea, but has also been introduced into it before.<sup>20</sup> Be

17 The pillar of fire was added only by the final redactor of the Pentateuch, cf. Groß, *Wolkensäule* 108f.

18 The transmitted text "and there was the cloud and darkness" is incorrect here and hardly reconstructable without any uncertainty. The reason for this is not so much a textual corruptness, but rather a redactional procedure, cf. Kohata, *Jahwist* 291. Because the Priestly Code continues in Exod 14:21a, 22 the redactor of the Pentateuch confronted the problem that the people of Israel could hardly pass the divided waters in utter darkness. To create a balance between the sources he had to ascribe the light he considered necessary for the nocturnal passage, to the cloud because this is active in v.20. The textual disorder basically results from the insertion of v.20aγ so that emendations or harmonizations in the text are unnecessary.

19 Cf. the doublet v.19a "set out and went behind them" with v.19b "set out ... and took its place behind them".

20 Cf. Weimar, *Meerwundererzählung* 46f.

that as it may, the doublet found in Exod 14:19a is obviously to be attributed to the same redactional procedure which we have already observed regarding the insertion of the angel's appearance in Exod 3:2a. Again, this raises the question: Why was the angel introduced into the story of the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea? The answer that one would not manage without him when dealing with such an important event like Israel's delivery at the Red Sea, is, of course, not sufficient. Instead, it is likely that the guiding and protecting role, which is primarily associated with the pillar of cloud in Exod 13-14 has something to do with the character and the commission of the Exodus-angel. That is why we ought to find out more about his mission. To achieve this we will have to follow his traces further through the Book of Exodus.

### 3. Look, I Am Going to Send an Angel in front of You

At Mount Sinai we find the Exodus-angel again, this time in a speech made by God which was added to the Book of the Covenant as an appendix (Exod 23:20-33).<sup>21</sup> This passage is special in several respects. This is the only section in the Book of Exodus explicitly touching the conquest of the land, mocking the foreign gods the inhabitants of the land are worshipping, and proclaiming that it is forbidden to conclude treaties with them.<sup>22</sup> Already this listing closely relates it to Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic literature, on the other hand does the introduction of the angel distinguish it from these. However, it does not presuppose that we already know about the angel because first God is talking about him without the definite article as "an angel" (Exod 23:20), then, in the following course of his speech he designates him more accurately and identifies him as "my angel" (Exod 23:20-24):

<sup>20</sup> "Look, I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have chosen. <sup>21</sup> Mind him and listen to his voice! Do not rebel against him! *For he would not tolerate your rebellion.* For my name is right within him. <sup>22</sup> If you actually listen to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an oppressor to your oppressors. <sup>23</sup> Yes, my angel will go in front of you and bring you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I will exterminate them. <sup>24</sup> You shall not bow down before their gods, nor worship them and do what they are doing, but ..."

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Kratz, *Komposition* 146.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Oswald, *Israel* 54 and 96.

So far we could only deduce the function of the Exodus-angel at the burning bush and at the Red Sea from the respective contexts, but now his commission is explicitly specified. A double task is given to him: On the one hand, he is to protect the people of Israel on their way (through the wilderness), as he has already done in the story about the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea. On the other hand, he is to lead them to the place God has chosen for them. The expression used here is in fact exceptional,<sup>23</sup> but especially the repetition of the infinitive “and bring you to...” in v.20 by the inflected verbal form “he will bring you to” in v.23, proves that the “place” does not denominate a sanctuary, but the territory of those residents which are enumerated.<sup>24</sup> When one also considers a number of occurrences of the *hif'il* “to bring to”, which take YHWH as their subject and the land as the object in the Book of Exodus as well as in Deuteronomy,<sup>25</sup> it becomes clear that YHWH is sharing the guiding and protecting role, which he has taken, with his angel. Therefore, one will not find any essential difference between the two; and one may not emphasize too much the change of subjects in v.23; there the angel’s commission covers only the time up to Israel’s arrival in the promised land, whereas YHWH takes it upon him to annihilate viz. to expel the land’s inhabitants (cf. Exod 33:2). Rather, the angel by himself represents God’s presence, as v.21 explicitly remarks. For God’s name which is an accepted symbol of divine presence in Deuteronomistic theology<sup>26</sup> also is with the angel. And this means that he is not only authorized by YHWH, but that in addition he stands for God’s presence, an idea also associated with the angel in the flame of fire in Exod 3:2a.

Therefore, it goes without saying that one must obey the angel’s instructions, as if YHWH himself had uttered them. The admonitions in v.21a and v.22 which are skilfully arranged as brackets to the declaration of divine presence, make it quite plain that the success of the angel’s mission is linked to the compliance of the people of Israel. Considering that Deuteronomy repeatedly says that on their way into the

23 For the phrase *הכנתי אשר במקום* cf. 1Chr 15:3,12; 2Chr 1:4 referring to the position of the Ark of YHWH and 2Chr 3:1referring to the place designated for the Temple. In these passages David and not YHWH is subject of *הכין*.

24 Cf. Ausloos, *Elements* 490-495; Neef, “Ich” 64f, hinting to the parallel mentioning of *מקום* and *ארץ* in Deut 26:9. Further, Num 32:17 is to be considered as well as Exod 32:34, where a number of witnesses add *המקום* according to the sense; cf. BHS.

25 Most interesting are those occurrences which connect YHWH’s bringing them into the land with his oath to the Patriarchs; cf. Exod 6:8; 13:5,11 with Deut 6:10,23; 31:20,21.

26 Cf. Durham, *Exodus* 335; and for the theology of God’s name cf. Keller, *Untersuchungen* 132-134.

promised land the Israelites resisted YHWH's order, the command in v.21a to withstand the angel by no means, gains its special disturbing quality.<sup>27</sup> Thus the paraenetic passages which are connected with his mission give the text its special character and again raise the question into what kind of context God's speech has been placed.

Traditionally the passage in Exod 23:20-33 is classified as an epilogue summarizing and concluding the Book of the Covenant. Is this characterization correct? Two observations evoke doubts about this. On the one hand none of the commandments assembled within the Book of the Covenant is mentioned again in its final section nor is there another appeal to obey these commandments.<sup>28</sup> Instead the admonitions relate to the guidance by the angel on the way and, from v.24, to Israel's behaviour after their arrival in the promised land. Thus one has the impression that it is a speech "which once served a homiletical purpose in Deuteronomistic circles in connection with the occupation of the promised land."<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, more recent investigations have found a redactional layer of the pre-Deuteronomic Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:24-23:12\*), which re-organizes the code and, by inserting the festival calendar taken from Exod 34, emphasizes that the revelations of the commandments in the former and latter pericope both dealing with Israel at Mount Sinai are identical.<sup>30</sup> Exod 20:22-23 and 23:9,13,14-19 already provide a framework for the Book of the Covenant so that God's speech in Exod 23:20-33 just reappears as an appendix or supplement in its present context. Taking into account its relatively isolated position, it is quite appropriate to characterize it – according to its theme – as a speech composed to supply the people of Israel (in addition to the Book of the Covenant?) with promises and admonitions on their way to the cultivated land.<sup>31</sup> Of course, one might ask why the dismissing speech was not placed either at the end of the Book of the Covenant or within the Book of Numbers just before the departure from Mount Sinai.<sup>32</sup> A rearrangement is out of the question because just a little later the angel's mission is dramatically focussed again, namely

27 In Exod 23:21 one should vocalize *hif'il* impf. 2. sg. m. juss. מַרְה, cf. Gesenius / Kautzsch, *Grammatik*, § 67y. For the phrases אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה cf. Deut 1:26,43; 9:23 and יְהוָה עַם יְהוָה cf. Deut 9:7,24; 31:27; for *qal*-form cf. Num 20:24; 27:14.

28 Cf. Durham, *Exodus* 334; Houtman, *Bundesbuch* 337.

29 Childs, *Exodus* 461.

30 Cf. Otto, *Pentateuchredaktion*, 74f; and the redactional Deuteronomistic layer Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Bundesbuch* 285f, has described.

31 Cf. Neef, „Ich“ 59f.

32 Cf. e.g. Smend, *Erzählung* 180-182, supposing that the speech of dismissal originally followed Exod 34:28.



after the Israelites' apostasy in Exod 32, thus presupposing the angel's being delegated.

Indeed, it would be very helpful for our topic, the Exodus-angel, if we could identify the group of writers who present the angel, his mission and his task to us in the dismissing speech. In research, though, it is extremely controversially discussed to whom he might be attributed, and that with good reason. On the one hand the Exodus-angel does not occur in Deuteronomy and in Deuteronomistic literature. Besides, there are expressions rather untypical of Deuteronomistic style.<sup>33</sup> That is why some wanted to draw the conclusion that the dismissing speech was formulated in pre- or proto-Deuteronomistic times.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand it is not to be denied that there are in fact also Deuteronomistic phrases and a number of typical themes that will originate in Deuteronomistic sources<sup>35</sup>. Special attention is paid to the relationship between Exod 23:20-33 and Deut 7:1-26, which is not working in one direction only.<sup>36</sup> So just two possibilities remain: Either one expects a pre-Deuteronomistic tradition (which would require to eliminate extensive parts of the text<sup>37</sup>), or one thinks that the entire dismissing speech was possibly composed by late Deuteronomists or post-Deuteronomistically. Though we cannot solve this problem here, in my opinion the second option hits the mark. It is supported by the fact that the secondary (anyway not being a pre-Deuteronomistic one) redactional layer of the Book of the Covenant through enclosing this booklet by the brackets, namely Exod 20:22-23 and 23:9,13,14-19, just makes it a speech of God and thus prepares the connexion with the dismissing speech. So we return to the Exodus-angel and remember that YHWH commissioned his angel to guide and protect the people of Israel in order to bring them into the promised land safe and sound. But the events at Mount Sinai follow closely, one on the heels of the other. While Moses is still lingering on the mountain and talking to God, the Israelites have deserted God and are dancing around the Golden Calf. It seems likely that God will revoke the commission to his angel.

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33 Ausloss, *Elements* 486-489, warns to identify Dtr phrases only with caution.

34 Cf. e.g. Neef, „Ich“ 60f. Considering the usage of גרש “to expel” Blum, *Studien* 371, however, is right to ask if one may assume a non-dtr or pre-Dtr phrase just because of an element of style uncharacteristic of Dtr.

35 Cf. Van Seters, *Redaction* 74.

36 Cf. the remark by Veijola, *Buch*, 201-205, that only the redaction focussing on the theology of the covenant (DtrB) in Deut 7:4-5,12-16,20,22-24 used the appendix to the Book of the Covenant (Exod 23:20-33) as a literary source. Deut 7:2 would be prior to Exod 23:32.

37 Cf. e.g. Osumi, *Kompositionsgeschichte* 63-69, and 212-217.

#### 4. The Angel Accompanies Them

These apprehensions will not come true. God keeps up his mission of the angel. Nevertheless, the following passage where we meet the angel once again, has a threatening ring because there are consequences to the Israelites having deserted YHWH. Once again we learn this through a speech made by God. Thus we can already give one important result of our investigation: The Exodus-angel is not a character who would be firmly established in a narrative context. Rather, he is a product of theological reflection tackling with the problem of God's presence with regard to the fact that this people is thoroughly rebellious and stubborn. Therefore we will not be surprised to find that also the reflections in the following passage regarding the Exodus-angel were inserted into a basic text. This seems to indicate that we are confronted with a redactional layer prompted by Exod 23:20ff. as a whole; the angel's introduction into the Book of Exodus is due to this.<sup>38</sup> Let us see whether and how the angel's mission changes after the people of Israel have sinned against YHWH (Exod 33:1-3):

<sup>1</sup> YHWH said to Moses: „Go, set out, you and the people whom you have brought out of Egypt, away from this place into the land that I have sworn to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying: ‘To your descendants I will give it.’ <sup>2</sup> And I will send an angel going before you and I will expel the Amorites, the Hittites and Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. <sup>3</sup> To an land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not set out in your midst because you are a stubborn people, or I might destroy you on the way.”

In the passage quoted above God actually gives the order to depart from Mount Sinai. On this occasion he assures Moses that he is not only going to keep up his oath sworn to the Patriarchs, but also to send his angel in front of the people in order to bring them safe into the promised land. That the angel was inserted into God's speech only afterwards is easy to see because v.2 interrupts the syntactical sequence of v.1 and v.3a.<sup>39</sup> Further, it is obvious that the reason given in v.3b, namely that YHWH will not set out with the people, cannot be connected with the order to depart, but only with the sending of the angel. Thus v.3b syntactically harks back to v.2 and at the same time offers the motive of the people's mourning and repentance described in v.4 (5-6). The entire passage is only clearly understandable when one knows that the people turned away from God and turned to foreign gods through

<sup>38</sup> Cf. especially Blum, Studien 365-377.

<sup>39</sup> The Septuaginta also felt this rupture and therefore created the beginning of a sentence for v.3a. The verbal start “and I will bring you in” does not improve the text. Rather, this reading makes the incoherence even more prominent.

the Golden Calf (cf. Exod 32:1-6). This connection is established explicitly, namely by the leitmotif עַם־קָשָׁה־עֶרְךָ “stiff-necked people”, which occurs in Exod 32:9 for the first time and is resumed in 33:3,5.<sup>40</sup> Obviously, the angel-redactor is convinced that the people of Israel have forfeited God’s presence among them because of their stubbornness. From this follows a severe theological problem that is dealt with in the present passage: How can God fulfil his oath sworn to the Patriarchs when he refuses to accompany his people on their way through the wilderness and into the promised land? And what does that mean considering the angel’s mission?

We will inquire into this problem with regard to three aspects. First, the Exodus-angel stands out more prominent and distinct. As compared with the combined action of YHWH and his angel that was to be observed in Exod 23:20-23, now the angel takes the entire function of guiding and protecting YHWH has entrusted him with. That is why he is the one who goes up from Gilgal to Bochim in order to reveal the people’s sin after the promised land has been entered (cf. Judg 2:1-5). As the generation experiencing the exodus stubbornly refused to listen to his voice,<sup>41</sup> the inhabitants of the land are not expelled, as YHWH had originally announced it in Exod 33:2. Secondly, the sending of the angel is not to be regarded as a poor substitute stepping in while God is absent. This interpretation is to be excluded because of the divine presence in, with and under God’s angel which is to be explained by the theology of God’s name. This also means that the declaration of divine presence in Exod 23:21bβ, which stands out within its context, obviously shows its full impact only within the present context. The declaration proves that the angel’s introduction is the only possibility to tolerate, right through the differentiation between YHWH and his angel, God’s refusal to accompany the people and at the same time to preserve his divine presence during the wandering in the wilderness. The idea that the main thesis of the Priestly Code, namely YHWH dwelling right in the centre of his people, is in the background of this reflection as a forfeited option, is not even absurd.<sup>42</sup> Thirdly, when God withholds his presence, this appears not only as a consequence of the people having deserted him, but also as protection for the people who

40 Cf. also Exod 34:9; Deut 9:6,13; 31:27; and dtr Judg 2:19; 2Kgs 17:14 as well.

41 Judg 2:2 establishes a link with the angel’s admonition in Exod 23:21. At the same time the angel of YHWH thereby also gains the competence to judge, cf. Judg 2:3 and Blum, Knoten 190-192.

42 Considering the enigmatic passage about the tent of meeting in Exod 33:7-11 this opinion is acceptable as one does not anticipate its classification regarding redaction history; fort this cf. Gertz, Beobachtungen 103.

have shown their rebellious and stubborn character. Any direct contact with YHWH would mean their immediate disaster (cf. Exod 33:3,5). In a certain sense the punishment of the guilty people is still postponed, and the realization of the purpose to bring the Israelites into the land safe, is entirely left to the angel. Anyway one can interpret the insertion Exod 32:34aβb which is found in the immediately preceding passage in this sense as well:

<sup>33</sup> But YHWH said to Moses: "Whoever has sinned against me, I will erase out of my book. <sup>34</sup> And now go, lead the people to place about which I have spoken to you. *Look, my angel will go in front of you. And when the day of judgement has come I will punish them for their sins.*"

## 5. Moses and the Exodus-angel

When we retrospectively try to find the theological line that connects the rather different supplements provided by the angel-redactor, we see that all these passages touch the problem of divine presence on the way out of slavery in Egypt into the promised land. In Exod 3:2a at the burning bush Moses experienced God's presence through the figure of the angel. In the story about the miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea it is the angel again, who corresponds to the cloud as a symbol of divine presence in Exod 14:20 and who protectively steps in between the two military camps. In the dismissing speech it says in the centre between the two mentionings of the angel's mission in 23:21bβ that God's name is with the angel. The subtle differentiation between YHWH and his name already provides the key for imagining that YHWH does not join the people while simultaneously there is divine presence because of the angel joining them. Thus the Exodus-angel enters his guiding and protecting role step by step and then also takes admonishing and judging functions (cf. Judg 2:1-5). For YHWH he finally becomes the only option to bring the rebellious and stubborn people into the promised land still protected by his presence which is then represented by the angel.

In Exod 33:12 Moses once more addresses YHWH: "Look, you have said to me: 'Bring up this people'; but you did not let me know whom you will send with me." This conversation loosely linked with the order to set out in v.1, also deals with the nature and possibility of divine presence in Israel.<sup>43</sup> Our angel-redactor passed his comment on this already in v.2 and put the angel by Moses' side: he is going to go with

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43 Cf. Noth, Buch 211.

Moses and to guide the people. Considering this one has to admit that the Renaissance painter Luca Signorelli showed a delicate feeling for the angel-redaction unfolded here, as he put the angel as a comforter by the side of Moses, who was, at the end of his days, exceedingly troubled because of the people's stubbornness. Both are gazing from the precipice placed within the picture to the promised land on the opposite side which Moses must not enter. But Moses is certain that the angel by his side is going to bring the people of Israel sound over there and thus will accomplish his life's work.

## Summary

The angel is found only in a few passages within the Book of Exodus. He is not a character in the story who would be developed through the narrative in the account of the exodus. Rather, his appearance is due to a theological reflection on God's presence while the people are guided into the promised land. Each single insertion of the angel can be interpreted as a part of a redactional layer which extends from the Book of Exodus into the Book of Judges (Exod 3:2a; 14:19a; 23,20-33\*; 32:34aβb; 33:2,3b-4; Judg 2:1-5).



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